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ALONG DUTCH WATERWAYS

BY ALEXANDER BLACK.

With original illustrations by Kruseman Van Elten.

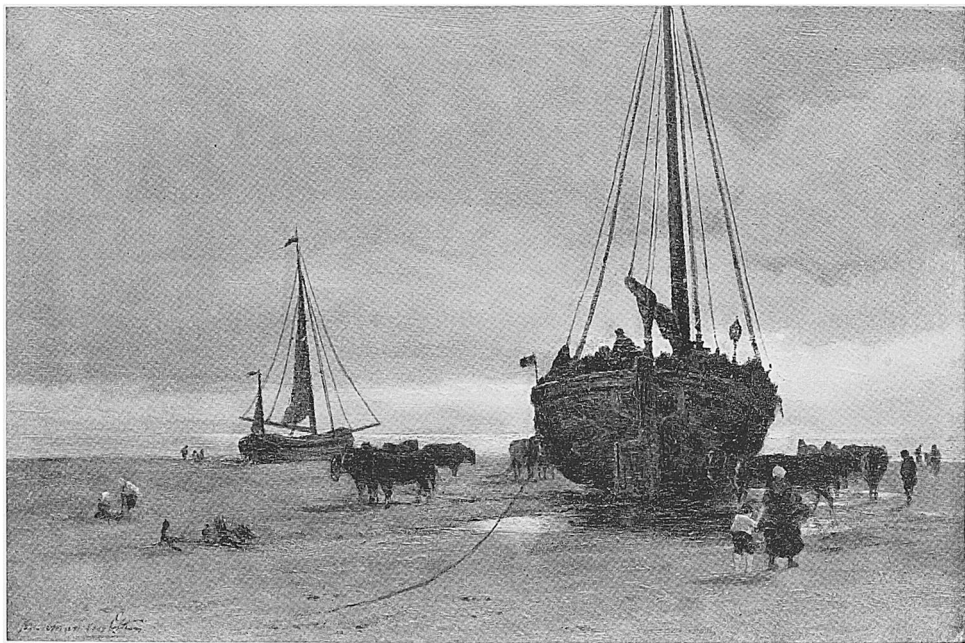


THE WINDMILL.

ONE of the paradoxes of art is, that painters do not always paint the picturesque. Some artists do not know it when they see it ; some others shy at it as if it were becoming commonplace. And there is, of course, a conventionally picturesque sort of thing, obviously suggesting a picture, that people point at and say, "What a picture that would make !" just as they would point at a highly seasoned human type and say, "What a character for a Dickens !"

Then, ideas of what is picturesque are constantly changing. Forms of composition and tricks of perspective wear out after a while ; and while certain effects belong to the inevitable mechanism of art and must always be found serving their turn, it becomes the office and function of artistic genius to create new ideas of the picturesque, to make use of new materials, as well as to recast old elements.

It probably is true that all natural, useful objects are picturesque to the artist who looks at them rightly. The notion that new things are not so picturesque as old is characteristic of people, in studios and out of them, who have not the



READY FOR SEA.



AT BURKSLOOT, ON A TYPICAL DUTCH WATERWAY.

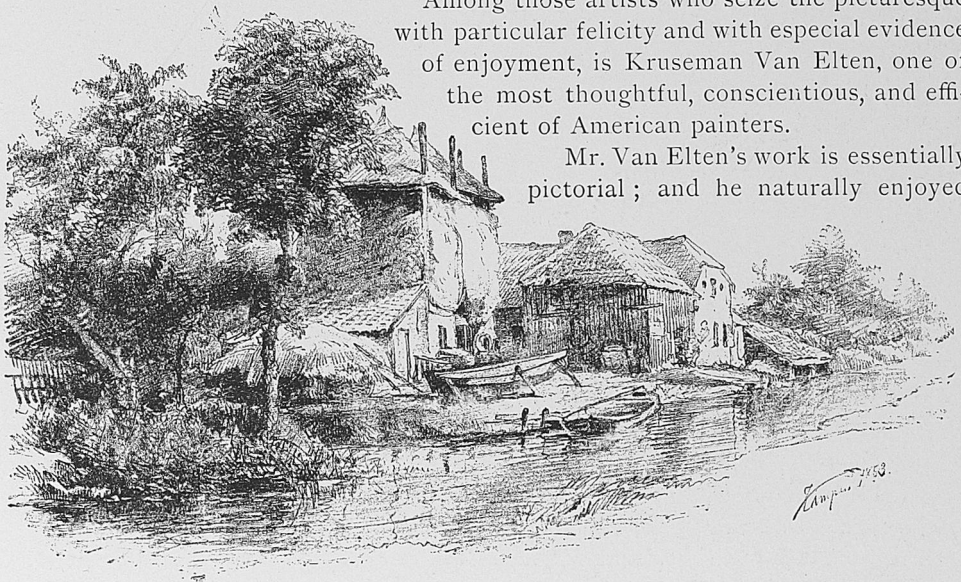
creative power. To claim, for instance, that a Brittany peasant woman is intrinsically any more picturesque than the same sort of woman in the foreign quarter of New York, is simply absurd—as absurd as to claim that the East River is not as picturesque as the Thames, or the Seine.

No great artist has ever raised this claim of relative picturesqueness to justify his selection of subjects. The greatest artists have found their themes as Adam found Eve—they have turned about, and lo! the theme was there.

Yet, aside from this question of essential or intrinsic picturesqueness, it undoubtedly is true that there is always a reasonable latitude for selection in which we can see the interesting range between a single note and a full chord—or, to more accurately carry the musical parallel, the range between a simply treated single theme and a fully rounded concerto. Admitting that all things are picturesque to the right hand, there will always be the greater or less of it in the painter's theme.

Among those artists who seize the picturesque with particular felicity and with especial evidence of enjoyment, is Kruseman Van Elten, one of the most thoughtful, conscientious, and efficient of American painters.

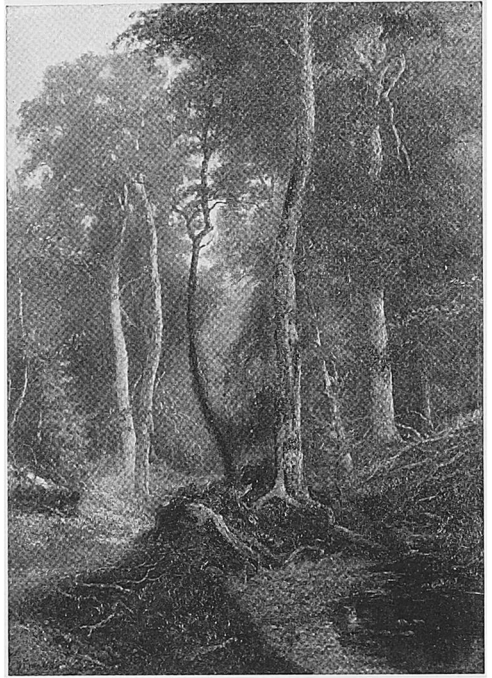
Mr. Van Elten's work is essentially pictorial; and he naturally enjoyed



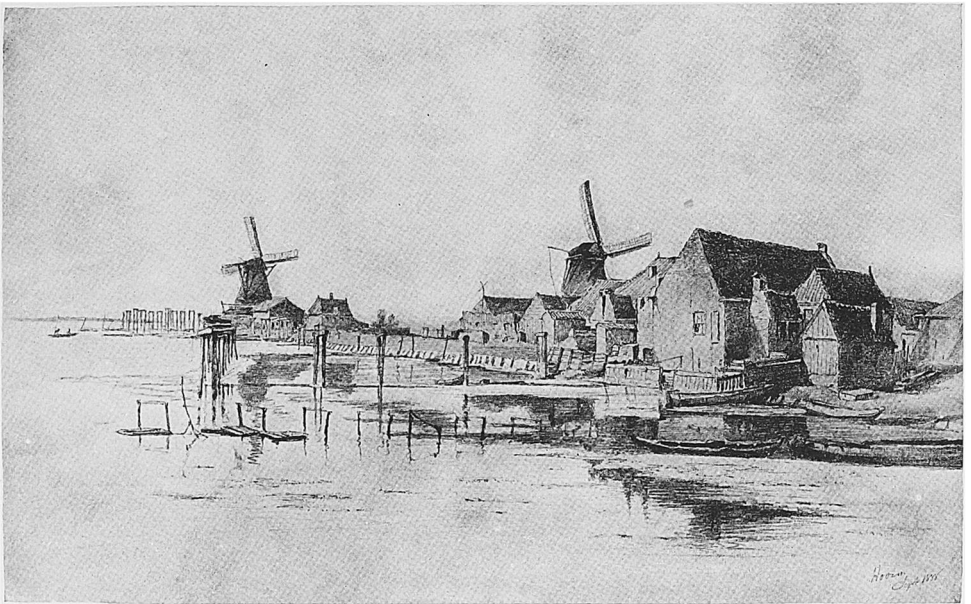
IN OLD KAMPEN, ON THE YSSEL.

himself in Holland. In the illustrations to the present article we have something like a symphony in windmills, with other Netherland glimpses eloquently reflective of the spirit of Dutch landscape. In "Old Kampen on the Yssel," near the Zuyder Zee, once one of the most well-to-do of Hanse towns; in the "Island Town of Dort," or Dordrecht, as Mr. Van Elten calls it, and in other Netherland nooks, this artist is exceedingly happy. What is more interesting than a windmill? What is more paintable? Whether they really were invented by the Romans or the Saracens; whether they really were introduced into Europe by the Knights of St. John; whether they really were first made to saw wood by Dutchmen nearly three hundred years ago, they have a curious fascination for the artistic mind. Writer and painter alike have delighted in them. Alphonse Daudet's "Letters from My Mill" could scarcely have had the same charm coming from any other place; and how many of the painters have delineated the mill with an affectionate fidelity!

Mr. Van Elten's mills are done to the life, with a keen sense of their individual interest as well as of their happy adjustability to other elements. In Holland you cannot misplace a windmill. They fit anywhere. They may be huddled and they



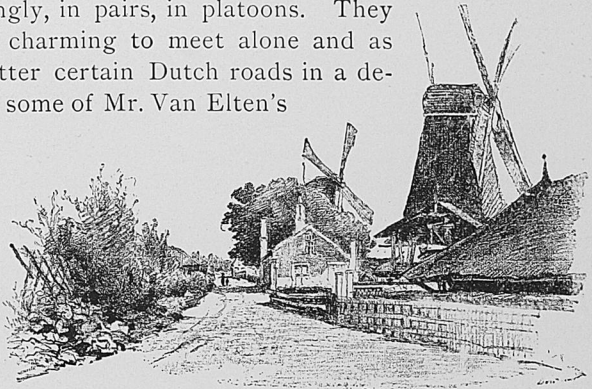
A BIT OF THE WOODS.



A GLIMPSE OF HOORN.

may be scattered. They go singly, in pairs, in platoons. They are like some people who are charming to meet alone and as charming in company. They litter certain Dutch roads in a delightfully companionable way, as some of Mr. Van Elten's studies suggest.

That windmills might be made to look much less graceful has been suggested by the contemplation of certain photographs of them taken at the wrong time, from the wrong point of view. Mr. Van Elten never mispaints them. He gives them to us at their best, and their best is very pleasant.



ON A DUTCH ROAD.

But then, a man with a "van" in his name should know how to paint windmills, and Holland canals, and Holland ships and shores. Mr. Van Elten exhibits a real enjoyment in these themes, which are quite inseparable from thoughts of Holland,

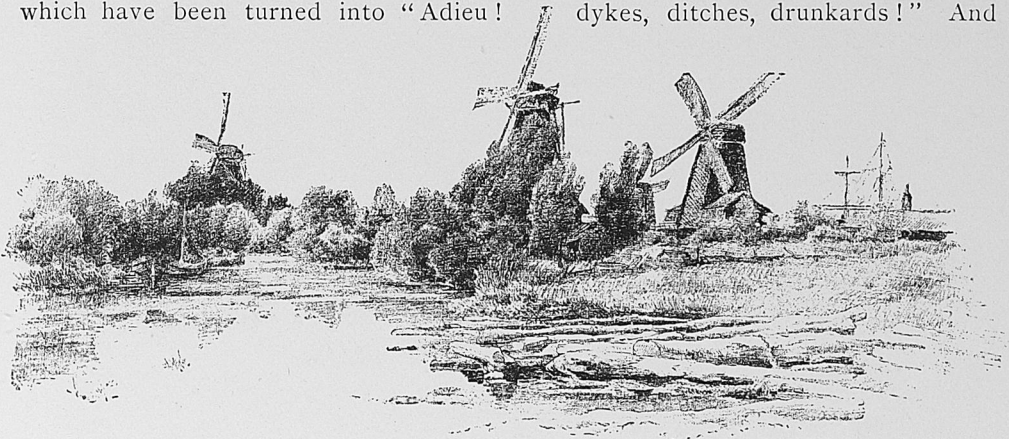


A KAMPEN HOUSE.

where waterways and boats are as familiar as windmills. The group of pictures shown in these pages admirably suggests the character of the remarkable little country whose refusal to be subdued by Spain Carlyle has so pithily described; whose leadership in popular education is one of the most remarkable phases of

European history, whose influence upon art constitutes one of its chief titles to glory, and whose elements of human interest are nowhere surpassed on the Continent.

Old Voltaire, who enjoyed a pungent fling, parted from Holland with words which have been turned into "Adieu! dykes, ditches, drunkards!" And



SAILS ASHORE AND AFLOAT.

Byron, who liked alliteration not less,
calls Holland

“ The waterland of Dutchman and ditches,
Whose juniper expresses in best juice,
The poor man's sparkling substitute for
riches.”

But the artistic traveller will be less likely to make qualifications in the case of Holland than in the case of almost any other country he meets with ; and to the American all that pertains to that country is not only interesting in sentiment, but seems natural and home-like. This is especially true for those of us who live in the neighborhood of New York, where the Dutch were the pioneers and the forefathers of whom we are most proud. Their names sound familiar to our



HAY-BOATS.

BESIDE THE SEA.

ears ; their rural as well as civic architecture has come down to us, here and there, sufficiently to familiarize us with its quaint characteristics ; the style of their ponderous boats remains in the cumbrous lighters that move about our harbor ; and upon the broad, still, marsh-girt reaches of Newark Bay and the Hackensack River you may see hay-boats and sloops, weighted to the water's

edge with brick, stealing down through the reeds, precisely as in the canals around Amsterdam and across the shallow lagoons of the Zuyder Zee.

Mr. Van Elten's style is admirably adaptable, as we find by a glance at his “ Bit of the Woods ” on a previous page ; and his range of moods is always wide enough to supply sustained interest in his expressions of nature.



A WATERSIDE FARMHOUSE AT BUKSLOOT.